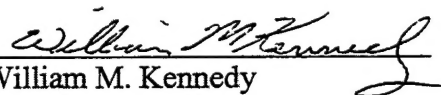


NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, RI

**OPERATION NOBLE OBELISK:  
An Examination of Unity of Effort**

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Operation Nobel Obelisk involved three Non-Combatant Evacuations (NEOs) from Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1997. During the operation, personnel from the Departments of Defense and State achieved a high level of Unity of Effort. The author examines the different approaches taken towards NEOs by DOD and DOS, how the differences were reconciled during Operation Noble Obelisk, and the unity of effort of the DOD/DOS team.

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The Commander, U.S. European Command (CINCEUR), established Joint Task Force Noble Obelisk (JTFNO) on May 27, 1997 in response to a coup in Sierra Leone and the ensuing breakdown of order in its capital city, Freetown. The JTF was comprised of the main element of 22 MEU (SOC), embarked on USS Kearsarge (LHD 3), and a Special Forces unit in Freetown. Its mission was the evacuation of "American citizens and other designated personnel from Freetown, Sierra Leone, to DOS (Department of State) safe haven evacuation point at Conakry, Guinea."<sup>1</sup> By the time JTF Noble Obelisk was disestablished on June 6<sup>th</sup>, it had conducted three separate evacuations, safely delivering 451 Americans and 2,058 third country nationals to Conakry.

Military and media sources hailed the evacuations as an unqualified success. Television stations, newspapers, and magazines covered the story. The final evacuation was the "largest single-day, non-combatant operation in the history of the U.S. armed forces."<sup>2</sup> The Department of State presented two of its Foreign Service Officers with the Secretary's Award for Heroism<sup>3</sup> while military participants were awarded the Meritorious Unit Citation. An important aspect of the operation which did not receive sufficient recognition, however, was the unity of effort achieved by personnel from the Departments of State (DOS) and Defense (DOD). By working closely together they were able to put aside differences in "institutional cultures" and overcome a number of significant challenges that threatened the operation. This paper will examine the approaches taken by the Departments of State and Defense in addressing Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEOs), how differences are reconciled, and the unity of effort during Operation Noble Obelisk.

In 1993 Adam Siegal, author of two studies of NEOs for the Center for Naval Analysis, pointed out, "During NEOs State and DOD coordination is, almost without fail, an

area with many problems."<sup>4</sup> One of the main reasons is that the diplomats and military commanders prepare for possible evacuations in parallel systems with demands that sometimes conflict. For DOS, evacuations take place within the broader context of U.S. foreign relations. Ambassadors must take into account international repercussions when planning, rehearsing or executing NEOs.<sup>5</sup> Although the State Department's Emergency Planning Handbook explicitly states:

To encourage initiative and candor, the Department's policy is that any such recommendation (to evacuate) shall be regarded as evidence of responsibility and there shall be no criticisms of a Chief of Mission's recommendation or other adverse consequences even if the anticipated threat or hazard should fail to materialize,<sup>6</sup>

most diplomats consider evacuations anathema.<sup>7</sup> "An evacuation is often viewed by an embassy staff as something that a proper diplomatic process should be able to avert."<sup>8</sup>

Another serious consideration for Ambassadors is the effect military evacuations, or actual rehearsals would have on the relationship between the U.S. Government and the host nation government. Both actions could be construed as a lack of confidence in the host government, undermining relations. Thus, the Chief of Mission often delays authorizing a NEO until after he has exhausted all other available options of resolving a crisis. This "often means that, no matter how long the contingency planning, NEOs are executed on very short operational notice."<sup>9</sup>

Military commanders, on the other hand, view NEOs as potential contingency operations that need to be planned, rehearsed on a regular basis, and executed as early as possible. Their primary concerns are the swift, safe evacuation of designated personnel, force protection, and returning military personnel to their primary mission. Commanders at all levels incorporate NEOs into their training programs. The Marine Corps' Special Operations Capable (SOC) certification process provides an example of such training. Each

deploying Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) must successfully plan and execute a simulated NEO in its final certification exercise (SOCEX). The Marines even incorporate DOS personnel in the simulation to provide authenticity.<sup>10</sup> The military's focus on early, rapid evacuation is fundamentally different from that of DOS and raises the potential for conflicting efforts during NEOs. To avoid such conflicts the Departments of State and Defense have established clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities during NEOs and have created liaison groups to facilitate cooperation.

### **DOS and DOD Coordination**

*The Memorandum of Agreement Between the Departments of State and Defense on the Protection of U.S. Citizens and Nationals and Designated Other Persons from Threatened Areas Overseas* dictates the respective roles and responsibilities of DOS and DOD personnel in NEOs. The memorandum lists the United States government's policy objectives:

- 1) Protect U.S. citizens and nationals and other designated persons, to include, when necessary and feasible, their evacuation to and welfare in relatively safe areas.
- 2) Reduce to a minimum the number of US citizens and nationals and designated others persons subject to the risk of death and/or seizure as hostages.
- 3) Reduce to a minimum the number of US citizens and nationals and other designated persons in probable or actual combat areas so that combat effectiveness of US and allied military forces is not impaired.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, both agencies also have their own directives which give guidance for NEOs. The Emergency Planning Handbook (EHP) serves as the Ambassadors' reference and Joint Publication 3-07.5 (*Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*) guides military commanders.

The Department of State bears ultimate responsibility for the protection of U. S. citizens and nationals abroad and for safeguarding their overseas property. DOD is tasked with assisting DOS "in preparing, and implementing plans for the protection, evacuation, and repatriation of U.S. citizens."<sup>12</sup> DOD directive 3025.14 orders the geographic CINCs to support DOS by planning and, when authorized, carrying out NEOs.<sup>13</sup> Individual Ambassadors submit Emergency Action Plans (EAP) for their respective embassies to their corresponding CINCs for review and recommendations. These plans are kept on file by the CINCs as references for future operations.

The Department of State has created liaison groups to facilitate coordination and cooperation between DOS and DOD in preparing for and executing evacuations. The Washington Liaison Group (WLG) is chaired by DOS and includes representatives of DOD, Health and Human Services, and the other agencies involved in the immediate crisis.<sup>14</sup> "Its responsibility is to ensure the coordination of planning and implementation of plans of the DOS and the combatant commanders. . . WLG designates the ISB (Intermediate Staging Base), temporary safe haven, and repatriation site."<sup>15</sup> The Regional Liaison Groups (RLG) have been established on the recommendation of the WLG to assist Ambassadors and CINCs. Each RLG is assigned to a CINC's area of operation. The RLG is responsible for coordinating emergency evacuation planning between elements of DOS and DOD in the field.<sup>16</sup> The final liaison group is the Emergency Action Committee (EAC). The EAC is made up of embassy personnel, the Defense Attaché, and members of the Country Team (representatives from all U. S. Government Agencies in the host nation). It "is the focal point for DOS and DOD evacuation site interface."<sup>17</sup> The EAC draws up the embassy's EAP and conducts periodic drills at the embassy to include, but not limited to fire drills, bomb

threat drills, and testing the Warden system. In the event of a NEO, the military commander will send a liaison officer to work with the EAC to facilitate executing the evacuation.

### **The Decision to Evacuate**

The U.S. Ambassador makes the decision to conduct an evacuation. Different types of incidents may lead an Ambassador to consider such a course of action including coups, revolutions, civil unrest, and natural disasters. Ultimately, though, the critical point is the inability of the host nation to guarantee the safety of U.S. citizens and their property within the host nation's jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup> Once the Ambassador decides that Americans are in potential danger, he takes a series of escalating steps. The steps may be sequential or concurrent depending upon the severity of the immediate crisis.

The first step is to draw down the number of dependent family members in the country and then embassy staff. The Ambassador must request permission from DOS to initiate a drawdown. "The basic options for drawdown are authorized departure and ordered departure."<sup>19</sup> Having received permission for a drawdown, the EAC draws up a list of essential and non-essential embassy personnel. Those considered essential will differ given the circumstances and the extent of the drawdown. The Ambassador then authorizes non-essential embassy staff and dependents to leave. These individuals depart using normal, commercial means of transportation. Next, the Ambassador may order the departure of "U. S. Government civilian employees, Marine security guards, U.S. military personnel assigned to the embassy, and dependents of these people"<sup>20</sup> Those ordered to leave the country do so through commercial transportation. It is important to note that the Ambassador does not have the authority to order private, U.S. citizens to leave a host nation. Rather, he notifies

these people through the Warden system, a communication network of civilian radio, telephone and other sources, that the embassy is drawing down and advises them to leave.<sup>21</sup>

A military evacuation is usually the last option the Ambassador exercises. If he feels the threat condition warrants evacuating Americans, he requests permission from the Department of State. Once permission is granted, he then orders the departure of authorized personnel and assists Americans and other designated personnel to leave the country.<sup>22</sup>

Although a list of Americans (F-77 Report) is kept at the embassy and updated twice a year, it is often inaccurate. Many Americans fail to contact the embassy after arriving in or moving about the host country. This makes the embassy's task of notifying individuals difficult and can cause problems for military planners.

After the American citizens and designated third country personnel have been evacuated, the embassy is closed and the remaining U.S. officials depart. The stated order of preference for means of evacuating people is: a) ordinary commercial transportation; b) commercial charter; and c) U.S. military charter.<sup>23</sup> If the Ambassador wants to use military transportation assets he must make a request to the DOD through DOS. If military transport is utilized, DOS must reimburse DOD for expenses incurred.

When DOD approves an Ambassador's request for military assistance in an evacuation, the regional CINC will decide which military units are appropriate for the mission. Usually the CINC will create a Joint Task Force (JTF) to conduct the NEO. While the Ambassador is the senior U.S. Government official in the host country during the NEO, he is not in the military chain of command. The Joint Force Commander (JFC) is solely responsible for the conduct of the military operation.<sup>24</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that the JFC and Ambassador coordinate their actions. If they do not, the unity of effort during the

NEO will be diminished severely. Joint Pub 3-07.7 dictates that the JFC will fully support the Ambassador's plans and work with embassy personnel without endangering the mission.<sup>25</sup>

The Joint Force Commander will establish a communication link with the embassy at the earliest opportunity. This allows initial coordination with the Ambassador and EAC. A Liaison Officer and a Forward Command Element (FCE) are then sent to the embassy. Their role is to advise the Ambassador on the JTF's capabilities and mission, establish a forward command post, establish secure communications with the JFC, advise the JFC regarding the size and composition of the evacuation force required, and ensure continuous and complementary planning with DOS personnel.<sup>26</sup> The JFC will then execute the NEO when directed by the Ambassador.

### **Operation Noble Obelisk**

On May 25, 1997, soldiers of the Sierra Leonean army, led by Major Johnny Koroma overthrew the civilian government of President Ahmad Kabbah. The rebels stormed the Pademba Road Prison in Freetown liberating 600 inmates including soldiers charged in previous coup attempts against President Kabbah.<sup>27</sup> The president fled to the neighboring country of Guinea. Later in the day soldiers went on a looting spree stealing vehicles from the government and private citizens. In the following days the situation in Freetown continued to deteriorate. The country's constitution was banned<sup>28</sup> and the Treasury and Bank of Sierra Leone buildings were burned. A number of former government officials were arrested and troops conducted house to house searches looking for others.<sup>29</sup> Hundreds of prison inmates joined the rebels and were issued uniforms and weapons.<sup>30</sup> Two rocket-propelled grenades and numerous stray rounds hit the U. S. Embassy as rebels fought loyal

Sierra Leonean troops while trying to capture the State house. A total of ninety-five windows were shot out at the U. S. Embassy.<sup>31</sup> At the U.S. housing compound, rebels used grenades to blast down the gate and steal vehicles. By Tuesday evening Connaught Hospital reported that 40 people had been killed and another 80 wounded.<sup>32</sup>

The senior U.S. representative in Sierra Leone at the time was Ann Wright, Charge d'affairs at the U.S. Embassy. Ambassador John Hirsch was in the United States. Ms. Wright worked with other ambassadors and UN officials to negotiate with Major Koroma in an effort to persuade him to return power to President Kabbah. At first it appeared that progress was being made but negotiations broke down. When it was evident that the situation would not improve, Ms. Wright requested permission from DOS to initiate a drawdown at the embassy. Ms. Wright recommended that DOS send a chartered, commercial aircraft to take U.S. citizens from Sierra Leone.<sup>33</sup> Both the British and Lebanese governments had been able to charter airplanes to evacuate their citizens. Initially, Sierra Leonean rebels had declared all travel into Sierra Leone prohibited. This stance was later changed after negotiations with foreign diplomats. In fact, Nigerian and Guinean troops, part of an ECOMOG force, had kept the international airports around Freetown open following the coup.

The Washington Liaison Group met following the coup to begin plans for a possible evacuation. Ambassador Hirsch was present for the meetings. The WLG received Ms. Wright's request for a commercial, charter flight but denied it. The group's reasoning was not explained to Ms. Wright. Instead, the WLG requested military intervention from DOD. Embassy personnel were directed to wait for the arrival of USS Kearsarge. Ms. Wright then negotiated with the British diplomats, arranging passage for some Americans aboard a

British chartered 747 on May 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>34</sup> The remainder of the embassy staff and American citizens in Freetown had to wait for the arrival of JTF Noble Obelisk.

### **JTF Noble Obelisk**

22 MEU (SOC) deployed aboard USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) on 15 April 1997 and sailed to the Congo as part of JTF Guardian Retrieval. The JTF was tasked to be prepared to evacuate U.S. citizens from Kinshasa, Zaire. As a result of the coup in Sierra Leone, CINCEUR ordered Commodore Gregory Ertel, USN, Commanding Officer, Amphibious Squadron 4, to re-embark 22 MEU (SOC) aboard USS Kearsarge and make best speed to Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2032 nautical miles (nm) away.<sup>35</sup> A number of Marines located in Brazzaville, including the Evacuation Command Center personnel, had to be left behind. Arrangements were made for them to be flown to Rota, Spain and then to rejoin 22 MEU (SOC).<sup>36</sup> On 27 May CINCEUR established JTF Nobel Obelisk assigning Col Samuel Helland, USMC (CO, 22 MEU (SOC)) as Commander, Joint Task Force Noble Obelisk (JTFNO). CINCEUR then issued a warning order for JTFNO to be prepared to conduct a NEO in Freetown. During the transit to Sierra Leone an initial communication link was made with the embassy via satellite. The JTF's Crisis Action Team prepared various courses of action which would allow a NEO to be initiated while Kearsarge was still 480 nm away. Their planning was influenced by the 1990 evacuation from Mogadishu in which Marines flew 600 nm at night, arriving at the U.S. embassy just as crowds were about to storm it.<sup>37</sup>

USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) arrived off the coast of Freetown on May 29<sup>th</sup>. The Liaison Officer and Forward Command Element were immediately sent ashore to meet with Ms. Wright and coordinate efforts with the embassy staff and a U.S. Army Special Forces Team

which had been in Freetown to train Sierra Leonean personnel. The liaison team also had to negotiate with the commander of a large ECOMOG force garrisoned in Freetown. The FCE set up a communications network between DOS personnel, Neo forces, the SOF team, and CJTFNO aboard USS Kearsarge. Then they reconnoitered the area accompanied by the DOS Regional Security Officer, Jeff Breed.<sup>38</sup> Later that day, CINCEUR issued an execution order for JTFNO to conduct the NEO.

JTFNO forces commenced the NEO at 6:27 A.M. on May 30<sup>th</sup>. Helicopters flew to the DOS designated evacuation site, the Mammy Yoko hotel. It quickly became obvious that DOS and DOD personnel were going to have to help each other in order to accomplish the mission. Based on information from the Embassy, JTF personnel had expected to evacuate about 400 people.<sup>39</sup> However, when they arrived at the hotel there were over 2,000 people present and more arriving. BGen Helland remembers that the F-77 Report was inaccurate and that the number of people from other nations requesting assistance had been underestimated.<sup>40</sup> The Department of State requires that all evacuees be identified as American citizens or designated by DOS personnel as individuals to be evacuated. This task fell to Ms. Wright and her staff. She was the person who ultimately decided which individuals could board the helicopters.

Evacuees are required to fill out a form (OF-28) which identifies the individual, gathers statistical data and contains a promissory note stating the evacuee will reimburse the U.S. Government for expenses incurred for the evacuation.<sup>41</sup> Since DOS does not adequately budget for NEOs and must reimburse DOD, this becomes an important task.<sup>42</sup> In Freetown, the DOS processing team, due to its limited size, could not identify people and then process them quickly enough to keep a continuous flow of helicopters moving between the

evacuation site and USS Kearsarge. Ms. Wright and LtCol Thomas Greenwood, USMC, the ground forces commander, agreed to assign Marines to identify Americans and people from countries that had officially requested U.S. assistance. Once the Marines identified the appropriate people in the crowd, they brought them to the DOS personnel for processing. Eventually Ms. Wright made the decision to shorten the processing procedure and finish it on the ship. At 6:20 P.M., having officially closed the U. S. Embassy, Ms Wright declared the mission complete. A total of three hundred Americans, all that had come to the evacuation site, had been flown to the Kearsarge. A small number of U. S. citizens had made the decision to stay in Freetown and refused the evacuation offer. In response to requests from more than 40 governments, Ms. Wright authorized 571 people from other third nation countries to be evacuated.<sup>43</sup>

The following day the evacuees were transferred to the designated safe haven, Conakry, Guinea. The DOS consular team set up the reception area at the airport in Conakry. A DOS team was flown to Kearsarge to complete the processing of all evacuees before they were transferred to shore. Once again, the processing procedure became problematic. People were being processed at a rate of between 50-100 people an hour. Sailors from Kearsarge were assigned to assist processing but problems soon developed between the DOS personnel flown to the ship to conduct the processing, and the sailors assisting. The members of the DOS team were focussed on getting complete, detailed, and accurate documentation while the sailors tried to get a minimum of information from the people in order to transfer the evacuees from the ship as quickly as possible. Ms. Wright stated that root cause of the issue was that the DOS processing team was inexperienced and did not have a working relationship with the DOS personnel from Sierra Leone.<sup>44</sup> The JTFC

and Ms. Wright resolved the issue and Ms. Wright ordered that only the statutory requirements of processing needed to be met. A second important challenge that had to be overcome concerned the status of Sierra Leoneans in Guinea. A number of Sierra Leonean government officials had been evacuated from Freetown. The Guinean government, however, considered them to be refugees rather than evacuees and initially refused to let them enter the country. Eventually, the U.S. Consular team in Guinea negotiated an agreement allowing the Sierra Leoneans to be brought ashore. In retrospect, the WLG should have anticipated the problem and made the necessary arrangements with the Guinean government before designating Guinea as the safe haven.

While evacuees were being off-loaded in Conakry, CINCEUR issued a warning order for a second NEO in Freetown. This was prompted by the Washington Liaison Group which received a number of calls about people left behind in Freetown.<sup>45</sup> A number of American citizens had called Washington saying that they had not been notified of the evacuation or had not been able to get to the evacuation site. The Lebanese embassy also contacted DOS asking for assistance stating people had been left behind.<sup>46</sup> Senior Executive Branch officials contacted DOS explaining that three of the Vice-President's nanny's children, who had been visiting their grandparents in Sierra Leone, had not been evacuated.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the WLG had also received calls about orphans being abandoned in Freetown. Ms. Pinkie McCann-Willis, director of the Freetown office of the Americans for African Adoption Agency had attempted to evacuate 18 children.<sup>48</sup> Ms. Wright had denied her permission to take the children since they were not Americans and did not have any special authorization. Ms. McCann-Willis called a number of Congressmen in the U. S. who exerted pressure on DOS which authorized their evacuation.<sup>49</sup> The calls to Washington demonstrate the difficulty of notifying American

citizens abroad of an evacuation. The embassy team had used the Warden system and publicized the date, time, and site of the evacuation. All the Americans at the Mammy Yoko Hotel had been evacuated.

Having received CINCEUR's order, Kearsarge suspended off-loading evacuees moved back to Freetown. Department of State and JTFNO personnel planned an evacuation for the following day. The WLG had wanted the second evacuation to take place during the evening of May 31<sup>st</sup> but CJTFNO and Ms Wright determined that the dangers involved outweighed the benefits.<sup>50</sup> The second evacuation followed the same script as the first. By 11:40 A.M. the Charge d'affaires had declared the mission complete. Seventy-three Americans and 274 third country nationals were evacuated. The Kearsarge took the evacuees back to Conakry and began to transfer them ashore. The last of the evacuees were flown ashore on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ambassador Hirsch, who had flown from Washington to Guinea, flew out to the ship to meet with CJTFNO and the embassy team. While the Ambassador was onboard CINCEUR issued an execution order for a third NEO from Freetown.

DOS representatives had called CINCEUR. They had received frantic phone calls from Mr. Roger Crooks, the owner of the Mammy Yoko hotel, the site of the previous evacuations. He stated that rebel troops had attacked the hotel setting it ablaze and trapping over 400 people in the basement. In fact, the rebels were attacking the ECOMOG command post located in the hotel. The rebels were responding to a sharp escalation of attacks by Nigerian ECOMOG troops.<sup>51</sup> Following the second evacuation, Nigerian warships had shelled Freetown for most of the day.<sup>52</sup> Mr. Crooks said that the situation at the hotel was desperate. Two people had already been killed, a British military liaison officer had been

shot, the temperature in the basement was over 100 degrees, and people were suffering from dehydration.

CJTFNO ordered Marine Cobra helicopters to fly from USS Kearsarge and to survey the situation. The pilots confirmed the hotel was under attack and on fire. CJTFNO was able to establish a communication link with the British Regional Military Attaché. The Attaché's radio signal could be picked up by the ship's communication system. While CJTFNO could not communicate with the British officer, he listened as the Attaché drove around the Freetown area delivering intelligence and helping to pick an evacuation spot for the following day.<sup>53</sup>

The final NEO was launched on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The British High Commissioner had negotiated with the rebels to allow the evacuation to take place unhindered but planners prepared to conduct the NEO under non-permissive conditions. Harriers and Cobras flew overhead for protection. An LAR unit was taken to the beach by LCAACs. After a period of confusion, trying to find where the people were, CJTFNO decided to establish the evacuation site at Lumly Beach, about one half mile from the Mammy Yoko hotel. Eventually people began streaming toward the site. As more and more people arrived, Ms. Wright had to make choices about who would be evacuated. Many third country nationals wanted to leave because of the escalating violence in Freetown. The British High Commissioner, the Egyptian Ambassador and a number of other VIPs asked to be evacuated. There were also many Sierra Leonean government officials whose lives would have been in great danger had they been left behind.<sup>54</sup> Ms Wright decided to evacuate as many people as Kearsarge could accommodate. This course of action required continuous coordination with the ship's captain who was concerned about exceeding the ship's capacity.<sup>55</sup> The evacuation was

finally halted at 3:55 P.M. after a total of 1,254 people had been flown to safety aboard Kearsarge. The ship then sailed to Conakry to deliver the final evacuees to the safe haven.

The next day, June 4<sup>th</sup>, all evacuees and DOS personnel were transported from Kearsarge to Conakry. Operation Noble Obelisk was a great success. The JTF conducted three NEOs in five days, evacuating 451 Americans and 2,058 third country nationals. In an uncertain environment, there had been no American casualties and the Marines had not fired a shot. The DOD/DOS team had worked well together to overcome obstacles and accomplish the mission.

### **Conclusion**

Operation Noble Obelisk presents a good example of unity of effort between DOS and DOD personnel conducting NEOs. Due to a combination of escalating violence in Freetown, difficulty in notifying people, and political pressure, what was initially expected to be a one-day evacuation of approximately 400 Americans turned into three NEOs involving over 2,500 people. The operation was successful for a number of reasons. First, all parties, CJTFNO, the Charge d'affairs, the embassy staff, and the JTF staff had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In a NEO, DOS is the supported agency while the JTF is the supporting command. An added benefit was Ms. Wright's prior military experience. She had a clear understanding of the military commander's role and the military system. In some cases, the only people at the embassy with an understanding of the military system are the Defense Attachés and the Marine Security Guards. This unfamiliarity can hamper the unity of effort. Second, communications were established early in the operation allowing CJTFNO to speak to the DOS personnel and get an understanding of the situation in Freetown. The

added information was crucial for planning. Third, the Liaison Officer and FCE quickly established themselves in Freetown and worked closely with the Regional Security Officer to gather intelligence and coordinate plans. Fourth, JTFNO and DOS personnel were willing to adapt and make changes to their initial plans. When the number of evacuees turned out to be three times that estimated (for each evacuation), the Marines and shipboard personnel made the necessary adjustments to accommodate the evacuees. When the DOS documentation procedure stagnated the evacuation at the Mammy Yoko hotel, Ms Wright reduced the procedure to the bare minimum required. Later she intervened with the DOS processing team to resolve their problems in coordinating with military personnel. Fifth, all parties made a concerted effort to work together and address challenges in a positive, constructive manner. Each of these factors contributed to the overall success of the mission and the high degree of unity of effort displayed by DOS and DOD personnel.

The evacuation from Freetown also provides future Joint Commanders tasked to execute NEOs some issues to consider.

1) As pointed out by BGen Helland, "NEOs often take on the personality of the Ambassador."<sup>56</sup> The Ambassador is the senior U.S. Government official on site. As such, he decides when a NEO begins, when it ends, and who will be evacuated. It is imperative that the CINC and JFC establish a positive working relationship with the Ambassador as early as possible in the planning process. A cooperative status can make or break a NEO.

2) The scope of a NEO may mutate given inaccuracies in the F-77 Report and treaties between the U.S. and other governments regarding evacuations. The JTF must be structured in a manner which gives the JFC flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. In Operation

Noble Obelisk the food, shelter and medical demands snowballed. JTFNO required substantial support from EUCOM and Sixth Fleet.

3) The CINCs and JFCs should work to promote greater interagency training and cooperation. In many cases the DOS personnel may need assistance processing evacuees. Sometimes the embassy staff is small. In other cases, personnel may have been sent away during the drawdown phase. Military personnel should be familiar with the processing procedures so that they can assist. A number of military personnel should be trained to assist processing. It would also be helpful if the JTF had a CD with the appropriate DOS forms or if DOS and DOD designed an interagency form meeting the administrative needs of both the JTF and DOS. Finally, an interagency after-action report (like those required by PDD 56) should be written after each NEO. Presently any reports or lessons learned are agency specific. There is little or no interagency feedback (unless things go wrong). An interagency report would give both DOD and DOS a list of things that worked well and challenges that need to be addressed for the future.

Given the current state of the global affairs, with more and more countries fracturing and hostilities breaking out, NEOs will be an important mission for the DOD for the foreseeable future. Joint Commanders must appreciate the different approaches taken by DOS and DOD towards NEOs. By studying Operation Noble Obelisk, JFCs can learn how to maximize the unity of effort of the DOD/DOS team.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 22 MEU (SOC) Brief, slide 3.
- <sup>2</sup> "2 FSOs Recognized for Service in Sierra Leone," *State Magazine*, March 1998, 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Adam B. Siegal, *Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO's): An Analyst's How to Guide*. Washington: Center for Naval Analysis, August 1993, 13.
- <sup>5</sup> State Department, *Emergency Planning Handbook*, 1533.1.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1410.
- <sup>7</sup> LtCol Richard L. Jaechne, "Evacuation Operations: The State Department – Military Interface," *Marine Corps Gazette*, March 1988, 48.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Siegal, *Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations*, 13.
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